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OCI Notes on Methodology

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Newsletter No. 42
October 9, 1975

Political violence is a characteristic of many political systems and consequently has been the subject of extensive study by scholars as well as intelligence analysts.[1] Interpretations of the causes of political violence are varied. A ground-breaking study published by the CIA in 1972 examined the role of generational factors in political violence.[2] A test of an alternative approach, based on the psychological theory that most human aggression occurs as a response to frustration, was conducted by the Agency in 1974.[3]

Very few attempts have been made, however, to measure the political violence in a single nation where the violence has not reached the level of insurgency or civil war. The intelligence analyst, in assessing the patterns of violence in a given nation, rarely has access to a quantified set of data that lends itself to easy measurement. Normally, the analyst is confronted with information that is too incomplete and too impressionistic.

This issue of the Notes describes an experimental project conducted in the Office of Current Intelligence to build and then analyze a systematic data base of political violence in Argentina--using the same imperfect information received by every OCI analyst.

It illustrates the kind of approach which can be made toward the analysis of a similar problem anywhere: the information available was no better and no worse than that available to most OCI analysts. This description shows that at the least an approach of this type can be of considerable assistance in clarifying some perceptions, in dispatching some misconceptions, in narrowing some uncertainties, and in detecting and defining trends before they might otherwise be appreciated.

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CONSTRUCTION OF THE DATA BASE

The data covered a one-year period following the death of Juan Peron on July 1, 1973. The information used was obtained from US embassy cables, CIA reports, FBIS and wire service reports, and NSA reports. The analyst identified 401 separate incidents that occurred during the period. The 401 incidents do not represent every terrorist act that occurred during the period; the Argentine government censors news and not all incidents are reported. Nevertheless, a wide variety of source material was utilized and it is believed that the 401 incidents constitute a representative sample for analysis.

Because the data was to be computerized, the analyst's first step was to design a coding scheme. For example, the analyst desired the capability of isolating and printing out all incidents caused by a certain terrorist group; this capability was achieved by assigning a unique code to each terrorist group. The analyst selected six such categories of characteristics to classify each event:

1. Date of incident
2. Type of incident (assassination, bombing, etc.)
3. Responsible group
4. Target of the attack (military, business, etc.)
5. Casualties
6. Source of information

The analyst then reviewed the raw information (cables, press reports, etc.) and coded each incident according to the six categories. A detailed description of the coding scheme can be found in the appendix.

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ANALYSIS OF THE DATA BASE

After coding, the data was transformed into a computerized format[5] and a computer program was utilized to obtain printed listings needed for analysis.[6] For example, the analyst requested a listing of the number of all terrorist incidents on a week-by-week basis for the entire year. The results were than plotted on a graph as one effort to determine if there was an overall pattern to the violence during the year. Figure 1 shows the result.

The graph shows that the year was characterized by rather sharp fluctuations in the level of violence. A week of intense violence is generally followed by a week with little activity. There are only two exceptions; the six-week period from September to mid-October and the seven-week period in March and April. The graph shows no general upward or downward trend.

It is possible that the periods of September through October (spring) and March through April (fall) represent a seasonal variation characterized by higher levels of violence. This hypothesis, however, cannot be tested without data for a period of several years.[7] A more promising hypothesis is that variations in the level of violence are related to the political climate.

In order to test this hypothesis, the analyst requested two listings; one showing the level of left-wing violence and the second showing the level of right-wing violence. The results of those two listings are shown in Figure 2.* Major political events of the year are superimposed upon the graph.

The orange line represents the number of incidents caused by the left wing; the brown line represents the number of incidents caused by the right wing.

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The graph suggests that the behavior of the leftist groups is indeed related to the political environment. For example, the quiet period immediately after Peron's death reflects the agreement of most leftist groups to refrain from political activity during the ten-day mourning period.

When Mrs. Peron first assumed the presidency the largest left-wing organization, the Montoneros, declared their support for her. As her rightist orientation became evident, the Montoneros became disenchanted and by the end of August a Montonero publication had tacitly endorsed armed struggle against a government that was "no longer Peronist." On September 6, the leader of the Montonero organization declared that the government's policies had forced his organization to return to the strategy of armed struggle. Figure 2 shows that these actions were immediately followed by the most intense period of leftist violence during the entire year.

The government responded to the escalation in terrorism by closing the University of Buenos Aires and enacting an anti-subversion law with sweeping arrest powers. At the same time, right-wing death squads such as the AAA increased their activity against the left. As a result the intensity of leftist violence began to decline. In early October, the ERP proposed a truce with the government in return for legal recognition, a repeal of "repressive legislation" and the release of political prisoners.

President Peron rejected the truce, and as the graph shows, the left responded immediately with a new upsurge in violence. The increase in terrorism caused the government to impose a state of siege on November 6. In the ensuing weeks, the security forces scored a number of major successes against the terrorist organizations. The campaign was temporarily effective--the level of violence remained low until January 1975.

In January, the left initiated a new campaign of violence. President Peron responded by giving the Argentine army a major role in combating terrorism--a role the army previously had sought to

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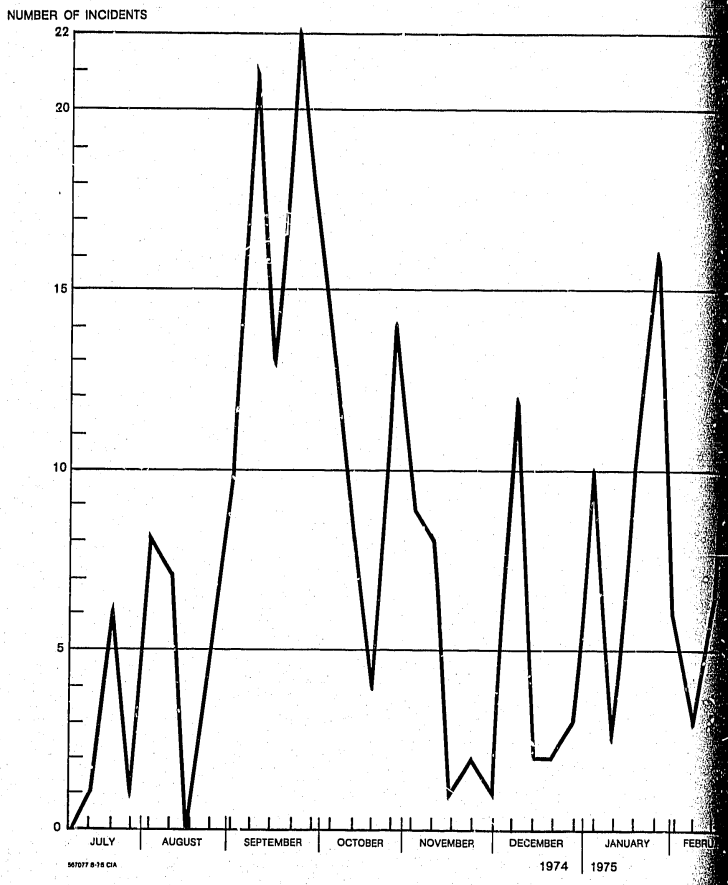
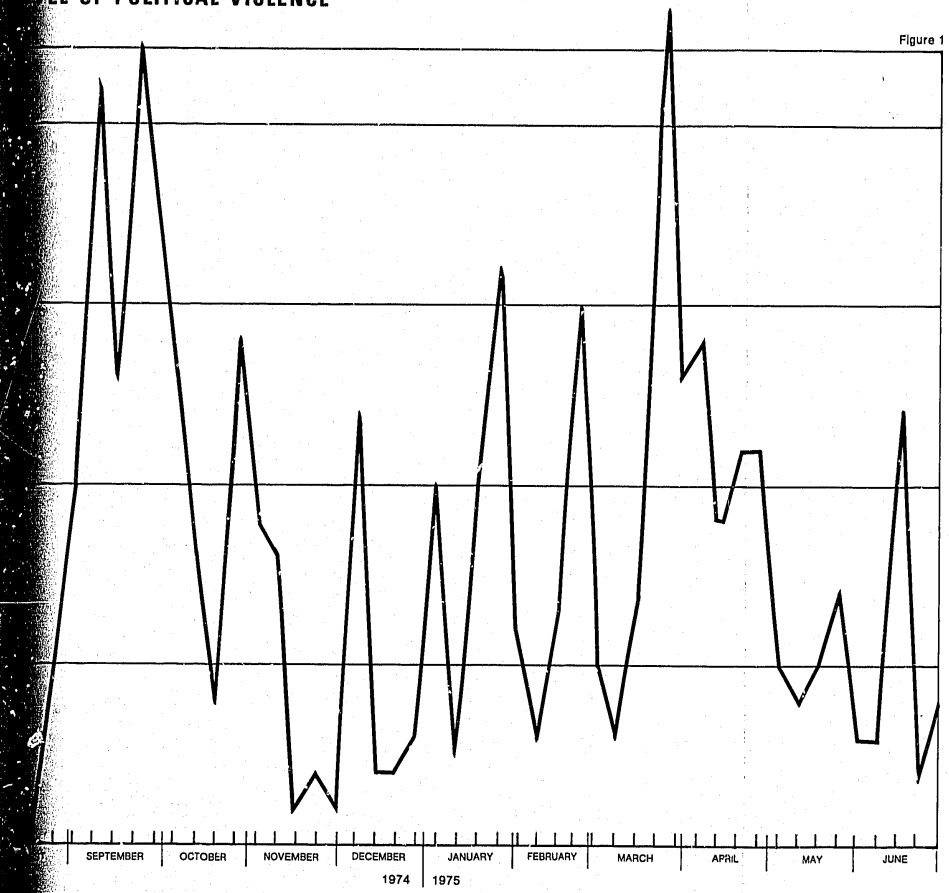
OVERALL LEVEL OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE



EL OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Figure 1



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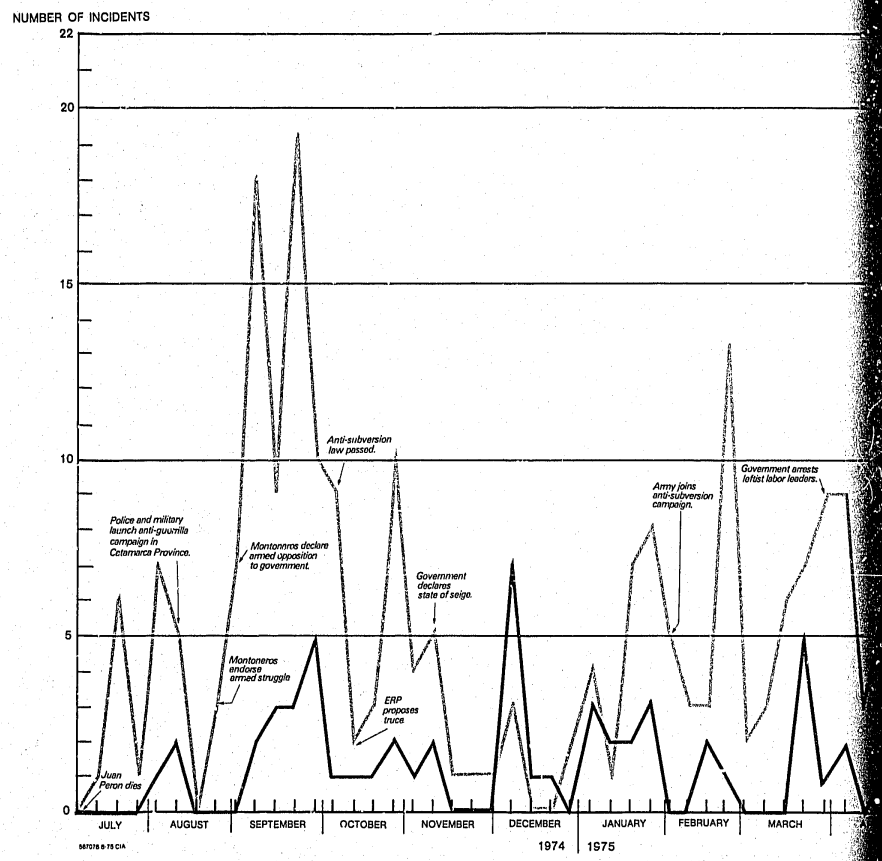
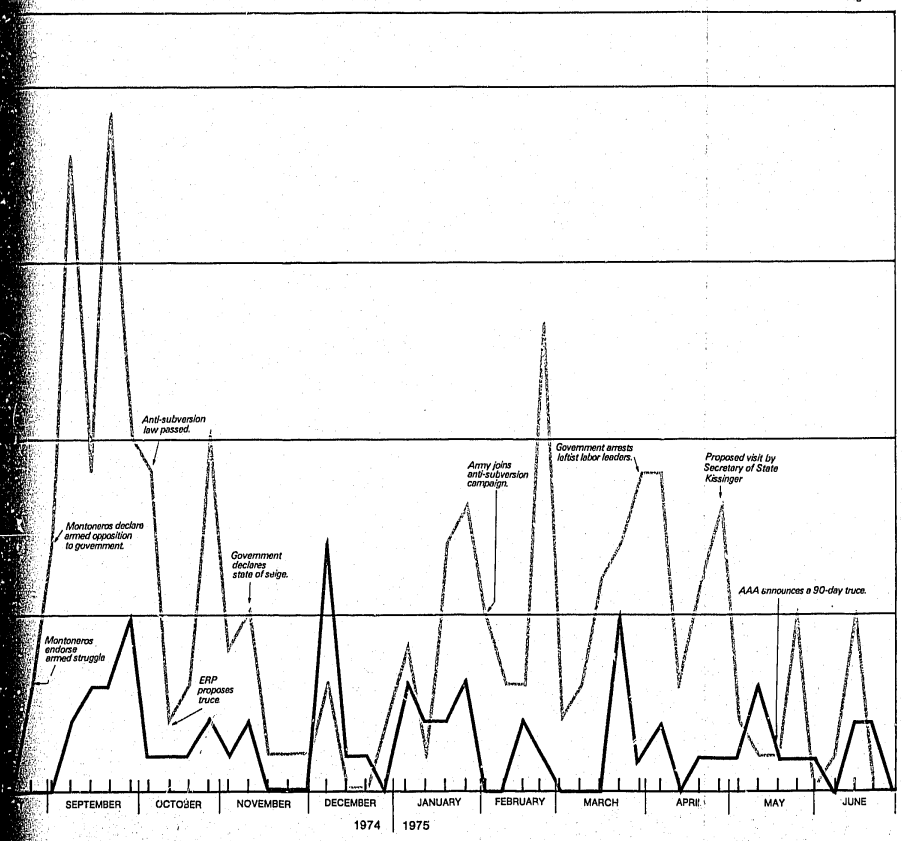
COMPARISON OF LEFT AND RIGHT WING VIOLENCE



OF LEFT AND RIGHT WING VIOLENCE

Figure 2



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avoid. The army immediately launched a massive anti-guerrilla sweep in northern Argentina, but achieved only minimal success. The terrorists retaliated by sharply increasing their activity in Buenos Aires.

The next major surge of leftist violence occurred in late March and early April, apparently in response to the government's arrest of a group of left-wing union leaders on March 20. The last major upsurge in violence coincided with Secretary Kissinger's proposed arrival in Buenos Aires on April 24; after the trip was canceled, terrorist incidents decreased. The period following the announcement of a 90-day truce by the AAA was relatively quiet. No significant terrorist activity was initiated by either side during the remaining weeks.

Thus, the pattern of leftist violence shown in Figure 2 does appear to indicate a relationship to the political environment. The pattern of right wing activity, however, is not easily explained by examining the graph. It was therefore decided to test the hypothesis that rightist groups tended to react primarily to increases or decreases in leftist violence.

An examination of Figure 2 does not provide a definitive answer, although upsurges in leftist terrorism are occasionally shown to be followed a week later by an increase in rightist violence. A statistical technique known as bivariate correlation was used in an effort to gain a better insight into this relationship.[8] The level of leftist terrorism for each week was correlated with the level of right-wing violence during the same week; the level of right-wing violence one week later; and the level of right-wing violence two weeks later. The results are shown in the table below.

TABLE 1

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEFT-WING AND RIGHT-WING VIOLENCE

	Right-wing Violence During Same Week	Right-wing Violence One Week Later	Right-wing Violence Two Weeks Later
Level of Left Wing Violence	.354	.262	.006

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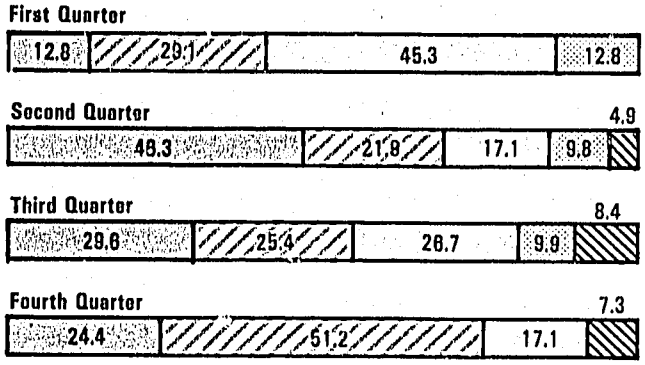
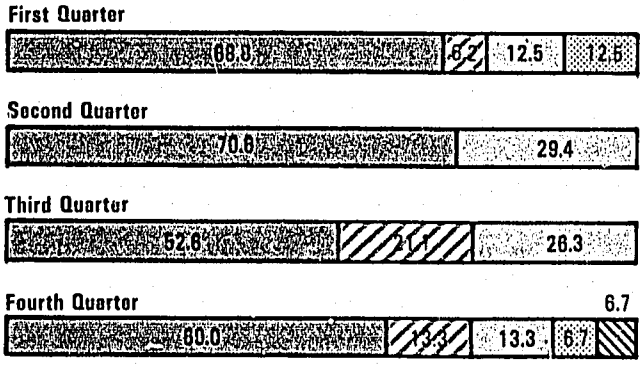
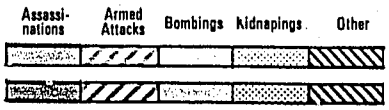
Figure 3

TACTICS OF LEFT WING TERRORISTS*



TACTICS OF RIGHT WING TERRORISTS





*in Percent

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A correlation coefficient greater than .280 is required to obtain statistical significance.[9] As seen in the table, this was achieved only in those instances when violence perpetrated by both groups occurred during the same week. The value of the other two coefficients is too low to indicate a right-wing response to increases and decreases in left-wing violence. Even the coefficient of .354 is a very weak relationship, indicating that increases or decreases in the frequency of leftist activity are not consistently associated with increases or decreases in rightist activity. Thus, it appears that the behavior patterns of the two groups are caused by other factors.

The analyst then examined the differences in the kinds of violence initiated by the left and right. The results of listings produced by the computer are shown in Table 2. It is apparent that the right clearly preferred the tactic of assassination.

TABLE 2

TACTICS OF RIGHT WING AND LEFT WING TERRORISTS

TYPE OF INCIDENT Responsible Group	ASSASSINATIONS	ARMED ATTACKS	BOMBINGS	KIDNAPINGS	OTHER	TOTAL
RIGHT WING	62.7	10.5	13.4	11.9	1.5	100%
LEFT WING	25.5	30.5	30.1	9.2	4.7	100%

The left utilized armed attacks, bombings, and assassinations almost equally while kidnaping was seldom employed. Despite the extensive attention given to kidnapings by the media, the results in Table 2 show that kidnaping in fact was a rarely used tactic.

The tactics of both major groups were examined on a quarterly basis to determine what changes, if any, occurred. Figure 3 shows several definite shifts in tactics by the left during the year. During the first quarter (July through September), the left utilized bombing as its primary tactic (45.3%). Assassination was rarely used during this period. The second quarter was marked by a shift to assassination as the primary method (46.3%),

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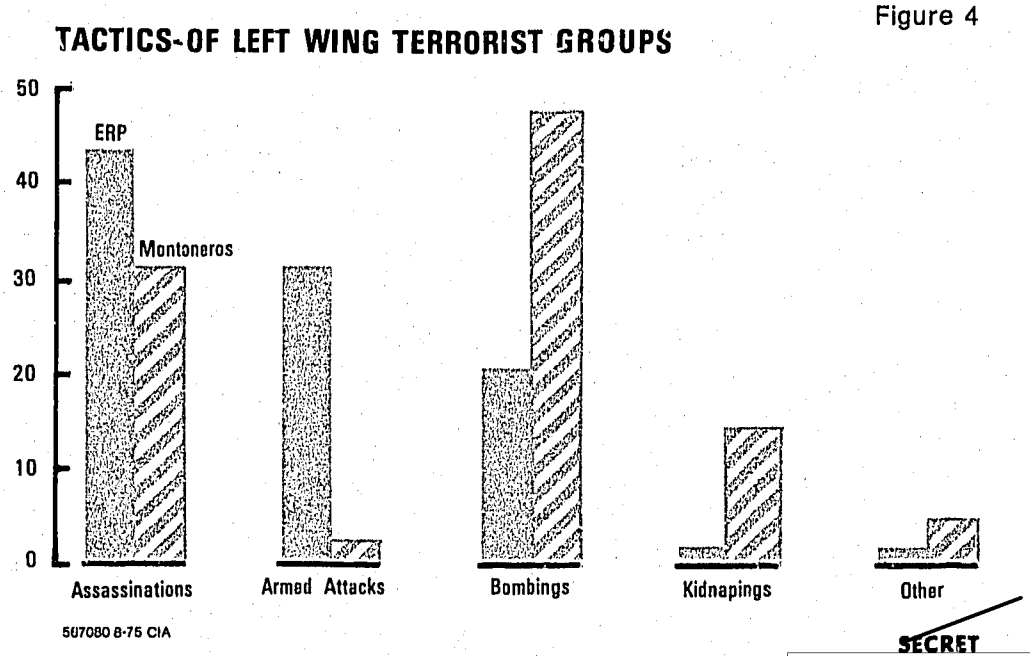
Figure 4



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while the third quarter showed a virtual balance between assassinations, armed attacks and bombings. The fourth quarter was marked by a shift to armed attacks (51.2%). During the entire period the left rarely employed kidnaping. The right wing consistently employed assassination as a tactic throughout the year.

Comparative analysis of the tactics employed by the two major leftist groups, the ERP and the Montoneros, shows significant differences. Figure 4 shows that the ERP clearly preferred assassination as its major tactic with armed attacks a second choice. The ERP used bombing on occasion but almost never tried kidnaping. The Montoneros, on the other hand, seemed to specialize in bombing. The Montoneros also employed assassination but rarely undertook armed attacks. This group was apparently responsible for most of the kidnapings initiated by the left.

The targets selected by the terrorists were then analyzed. Table 3 reveals that the rightists concentrated almost completely upon targets described as "leftist." This category should be treated with some caution, however; since the right wing was frequently unable to get at true members of leftist terrorist groups, it often resorted to attacking individuals whose political philosophy was known to be left of center.

TABLE 3

TARGETS OF RIGHT WING AND LEFT WING TERRORISTS

TARGET / Resp. Grp	GOVERNMENT	MILITARY	POLICE	BUSINESS	RIGHT WING	LEFT WING	US GOVT	UNIVERSITIES	OTHER	TOTAL
RIGHT WING	3.0			3.0		77.6		6.0	10.4	100%
LEFT WING	11.3	15.9	24.7	32.3	4.2		3.8	1.2	6.7	100%

Leftist terrorists, however, went after a broad range of targets. Commercial establishments were an important target of the left (32.2%) with the police a close second (24.7%). By combining the military and police categories, it can be seen that the security forces were the main target of

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the left (40.6%). Other targets received scant attention from the left. Surprising enough, employees and property of the US government served rarely as targets of the leftist groups.

A comparative examination of the victims of the two main leftist groups shows that their target selection is relatively similar even though their tactics have been shown to be very different. Looking at Table 4, the most significant difference is the emphasis placed upon the security forces by the two groups. The military and police are the most important target of the ERP (41.7%). The Montoneros, however, attacked the security forces much less frequently (23.8%) than business (47.7%). A similar table for the right wing would be meaningless since virtually all right-wing incidents were initiated by one group, the AAA.

TABLE 4

TARGETS OF LEFT WING TERRORISTS

TARGET / RESPONSIBLE GROUP	GOVERNMENT	MILITARY	POLICE	BUSINESS	RIGHT WING	US GOVT	UNIVERSITIES	OTHER	TOTAL
ERP	12.5	27.1	14.6	31.3	8.3	0.0	0.0	6.2	100.0%
MONTONEROS	9.5	9.5	14.3	47.7	7.1	7.1	4.8	0.0	100.0%
ALL LEFT WING	11.3	15.9	24.7	32.2	4.2	3.8	1.2	6.7	100.0%

An analysis of changes in the selection of the victims by the terrorists over time produces a trend. Table 5 portrays the targets of the left wing for each quarter of the year. The figures clearly show that the left shifted its emphasis during the year. Business establishments were targetted heavily during the first quarter (46.5%), but received much less attention during the next three quarters. The armed forces became the primary target during the second quarter (36.6%). In

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the third quarter the left shifted its attention to the police (35.2%) and virtually ignored the military (7.0%). The police remained the main target during the last quarter (36.6%), but the military again became an important target (17.1%). A similar analysis for the right wing, however, shows a different pattern. Table 6 shows that throughout the year the right focused almost exclusively upon leftist targets.

TABLE 5

TARGETS OF LEFT WING TERRORISTS BY QUARTER

TARGET / PERIOD	GOVERNMENT	MILITARY	POLICE	BUSINESS	US	UNIVERSITIES	RIGHT WING	OTHER	TOTAL
1st QUARTER	16.3	12.8	15.1	46.5				8.1	100.0%
2nd QUARTER	7.3	36.6	14.6	22.0	4.9	2.4	7.3	4.9	100.0%
3rd QUARTER	8.4	7.0	35.2	29.6	8.4		7.0	4.2	100.0%
4th QUARTER	9.7	17.1	36.6	17.1		4.9	4.9	9.8	100.0%

TABLE 6

TARGETS OF RIGHT WING TERRORISTS BY QUARTER

TARGET / PERIOD	GOVERNMENT	MILITARY	POLICE	BUSINESS	US	LEFT WING	UNIVERSITIES	OTHER	TOTAL
1st QUARTER	6.2					75.0	12.5	6.3	100.0%
2nd QUARTER						88.2	11.8		100.0%
3rd QUARTER	5.3			10.5		57.9		26.3	100.0%
4th QUARTER						93.3		6.7	100.0%

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CONCLUSIONS

Conduct of the study demonstrated that simple quantitative techniques can be applied to the kind of information received by OCI analysts, irregular or fragmentary as it may be. In the case of Argentina, by utilizing these techniques, the analyst was able to make statements of greater precision than before about the behavior patterns of the various terrorist organizations and to test the validity of many "conventional wisdoms" concerning violence in Argentina, cutting through some of the fogging of perceptions effected by the media--e.g., the wide publicity given what was actually a relatively limited number of kidnapings.

These techniques could be applied to the problem of international terrorism as well. In this Argentine study, considerable time was required to collect the source material and code the data. The study was made a year after the fact, but could have been carried on during ongoing screening of current material. The eventual arrival of SAFE, with its powerful search capabilities, will make data gathering simpler.

Further information concerning this project or techniques utilized can be obtained from 3.5(c)

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FOOTNOTES

1 Examples of academic studies on this subject include Harry Eckstein (ed.), Internal War; Douglas A. Hibbs, Mass Political Violence; Ted Gurr, Why Men Rebel; Brian Jenkins, International Terrorism; Chalmers Johnson, Revolutionary Change; and Paul Wilkinson, Political Terrorism.

2 "An Interpretation of Generational Politics: The Uruguayan Model" Intelligence Memorandum No. 2056/76, 26 July 1972.

3 "An Analytical Model for Assessing the Causes and Consequences of Political Violence" Research Project No. OPR-502, August 1974.

4 The information was collected and organized by Andrea Starr.

5 The coded information was keypunched by OJCS and the cards were read into the VM interactive system. The data could then be accessed with a computer terminal.

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7 OCI has recently obtained a data set from the Inter University Consortium for Political Research (ICPR) containing information on political violence in Argentina from 1955-1972. The data is being processed and will be available for analysis within 4-6 weeks.

8 Bivariate correlation describes the degree to which two variables are related. The relationship under study is the degree to which a given change in the value of one variable is always accompanied by a certain change in the value of the other.

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For example, if every increase of two units in variable A (such as left wing incidents) is always accompanied by an increase of one unit in variable B (such as right wing incidents) a perfect positive relationship would exist and the correlation coefficient would equal +1.000. In the same way, if every increase of two units in variable A is always accompanied by a decrease of one unit in variable B, a perfect negative relationship would exist and the correlation coefficient would equal -1.000. If absolutely no relationship existed between the two variables, the correlation coefficient would equal 0.000. A detailed explanation of correlation can be found in Hubert M. Blalock, Social Statistics, pp. 273-299.

9 Statistical significance in this case related to the likelihood that a correlation coefficient found in our sample of 401 incidents represents the true relationship that exists between the behavior patterns of the left and right wing terrorists in Argentina.

When there is a high correlation coefficient one can be confident that a relationship actually does exist. On the other hand, when the coefficient is below a certain level, one can no longer be sure that it accurately represents reality. It is possible that a relatively low correlation coefficient indicating a weak relationship could be obtained by sheer change. In this case, the "cut-off point" is .280.

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APPENDIX

The data for this study consists of 401 terrorist incidents that occurred between July 1, 1974 and June 30, 1975. The information was collected from CIA reports, embassy cables, FBIS reports, and open press material. The information was classified according to six major categories:

1. Date of Incident: The period covered by the analysis--one calendar year--was subdivided into 52 sequential weeks. Each incident was dated according to the appropriate week. An event which occurred on 10 July 1974 would be grouped with all other incidents in the second sequential week, that is the period from 8-14 July 1974.

2. Actor: The political group or organization responsible for causing the incident. There were eight categories of actors:

--The People's Revolutionary Army (ERP)

--Monteneros

--Left Wing; this category was utilized when the specific name of a leftist actor could not be determined.

--AAA

--Right Wing; this category was utilized when the specific name of a rightist actor could not be determined.

--Police

--Military

--Unknown

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3. Type of Incident: The nature of a terrorist incident. There were five categories:

--Assassination; an incident initiated for the express purpose of killing a specific individual, or group of individuals.

--Bombing; an incident involving the use of explosive device to destroy a building or facility, or to kill and wound random persons.

--Kidnaping; an incident involving the abduction of one or more persons.

--Armed Attack; incidents involving shootings, sniper incidents, small or large unit attacks against an installation, facility, or persons.

--Other; any incident not falling into one of the four categories above. For example, a verbal threat of violence against an individual.

4. Target: The nature of the group or organization attacked. There were 16 categories:

--Military; personnel or facilities belonging to the Argentine armed forces, includes retired personnel.

--Police; personnel or facilities belonging to Argentine police forces.

--Government; personnel or facilities belonging to local or national government, excluding police and military. Includes members of political parties who support the national government.

--Argentine business; any business establishment owned by Argentine nationals.

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--Foreign business; any business establishment owned by US or other foreign nationals.

--Business, general; any business establishment with nationality of ownership unknown.

--Newspaper; any newspaper publishing firm.

--US, official; any US government employee or any facility operated by US government.

--ERP

--Montoneros

--Left Wing; specific group unknown.

--University; employees of a university or buildings belonging to a university.

--Labor; members of a labor union or facilities owned by a labor union.

--AAA

--Right Wing; specific group unknown.

--Unknown or other; nature of target unknown. Includes targets not falling into any of categories described above.

5. Casualties: The number of casualties that resulted from each incident were classified into 5 separate categories:

--Number of actors killed.

--Number of actors wounded.

--Number of targets killed.

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--Number of targets wounded.

--Number of targets kidnaped.

6. Source: The primary source of information for each incident. There were five categories:

--FBIS

--Wire Services (Reuters, AP, etc.)

--State Department Cables

--CIA reports

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